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Shared Stewardship

A Strategy for BLM's Volunteer Program 1990-1995

Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Message from the Secretary --

"Each day, thousands of citizens volunteer their time, labor and expertise on behalf of America's 750 million acres of public lands. The Department of the Interior and its bureaus encourage volunteer stewardship throughout the country - in parks, refuges, lakes, streams, reservations and multiple use lands.

America's precious resources belong to all of us, and we have a responsibility to leave them in better condition for future generations."

Manuel Lujan
Secretary of the Interior

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Message from the Director --

" BLM Volunteers are fast becoming one of our most important and productive resources. Our citizen volunteers, working side-by-side with our employees are helping us accomplish our multiple use mission. With their steadfast support and contributions, BLM will obtain full implementation of its initiatives for the 1990's, including Recreation 2000 and Fish and-Wildlife 2000."

Cy Jamison
Director, BLM

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Introduction

BLM manages the resources on nearly 300 million acres of public lands, and the mineral estate underlying 572 million acres. With its unique mandate of multiple-use management, its responsibilities are varied and complex. BLM has long recognized the importance of working in concert with public and private entities to carry out its mission. BLM currently has a number of established partnerships with user groups, State and local governments and volunteer groups. For nearly a decade, BLM volunteers have made important contributions in all program areas.

BLM's goal is to expand and maximize the effective use of its volunteer workforce. This will have many benefits. First, it will enhance BLM's capabilities for **resource protection** and **service to user groups**. BLM's programs must compete with other important national priorities for limited Federal dollars. In the face of continuing budgetary constraints, BLM must consider all avenues for meeting its stewardship mission. Expansion and better utilization of the volunteer workforce is one such avenue. Second, expansion of the volunteer program will serve to broaden **public awareness of the public lands**. Many Americans are simply not aware of the vast resources held in trust by BLM for the American people. Further, expansion of BLM's volunteer workforce will broaden **public understanding of BLM's multiple use mission** and increase **public participation in managing the public lands resources**.

In the next decade BLM faces numerous difficult and complex resource management decisions and choices. An educated and involved public can provide invaluable assistance to BLM in addressing these difficult issues. Finally, encouraging volunteer participation is an effective way for BLM to promote a **public lands stewardship ethic** - one of the key goals of the Secretary of the Interior. In his words - "America's precious resources belong to all of us and we have a responsibility to leave them in better condition for future generations."

Background on BLM Volunteer Program

Authorities and Existing Guidance

BLM's basic authority to accept volunteers and contributions of services is provided in Section 307(c) of the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA). This section authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to accept contributions of money, services, and property. . . "for the management, protection, development, acquisition, and conveying of the public lands including the acquisition of rights-of-way for such purposes." The Secretary has delegated this authority to the BLM Director.

In 1984, this basic authority was augmented by the enactment of an amendment to the Volunteers in the Parks Act of 1969 (Public Law 98-540). A key element of this law is Section 2 which authorizes the appropriation of up to $250,000 annually for direct costs associated with the BLM volunteer program. Among other things, this authorizes BLM to pay for services or costs incidental to the utilization of volunteers. Another key provision of the 1984 law assures that BLM volunteers have the same eligibility as do Federal employees for two important benefits or protection: coverage for work-injury compensation and tort claims liability.

BLM Manual, Section 1114 (Volunteers), covers basic authorities, responsibilities, definitions, volunteer eligibility status and guidance on recruiting, selecting and working with volunteers.

Volunteer Contributions 1981-1989

BLM has almost a decade of experience in volunteer administration. In 1981, the BLM "Volunteers for the Public Lands" program was initiated by inviting citizens to lend BLM a hand in public lands management activities. In the first year, BLM attracted 981 volunteers who contributed 35 workyears of service valued at $372,000. In the ensuing 8 years, the volunteer program has grown more than 15-fold. Currently, more than 14,000 individuals donate their time, energy and expertise to BLM each year. In FY 1989, these unpaid workers contributed more than 771,000 hours of work, valued at $6.5 million at a cost of $585,293. The estimated value of work accomplished by volunteers since the inception of the program is roughly $28 million, with a benefit-to-cost relationship averaging 8 to 1.

Hoster Worker Contributions

In addition to volunteers, BLM has used the services of "hosted workers." Hosted workers are persons who assist BLM but are paid wages by some source other than BLM. In 1989, field managers reported they were assisted by a total of 1,066 hosted workers, who served 319,087 hours and accomplished work valued at $2,718,154. The estimated benefit-to cost relationship was approximately 20 to 1.

Strategy Plan

Background

Although BLM volunteers and hosted workers have contributed over 3 million hours of service over the life of the program, the full potential of volunteers has not yet been realized. BLM has not fully integrated the volunteer program into its resource management planning system. In most field offices, supervision of volunteers has been a collateral duty for involved BLM staff. As a consequence, BLM has not been in a position to take full advantage of the talents and expertise of the volunteer workforce. In many cases BLM staff lack specialized training in volunteer recruitment, supervision, and recognition. The equipment and supplies needed by volunteers to carry out work are not always readily available. Turnovers in BLM staff working with volunteers has resulted in a lack of program continuity. Well-designed systems for analyzing the expertise of volunteers and matching them with BLM program objectives set forth in resource management plans and project plans have not been developed.

Purpose

The purpose of the Strategy Plan is to fully integrate the volunteer program with BLM's resource management planning system over the next five years and make volunteers full partners with BLM as stewards of the public lands.

Benefits

It will ensure that volunteer resources are directed to the most critical agency program objectives. In addition, it will ensure that volunteers and other supplemental workers receive the support necessary to carry out the vital services they perform. In will ensure that BLM staff will have the time and the specialized training needed to recruit and supervise volunteers and the incentive to use them effectively to accomplish the agency's important mission.

Implementation Plan

The Strategy Plan outlines **goals** and **objectives** for BLM's volunteer program over the next five years. The actions required to meet these goals and objectives and the identification of BLM staff with responsibility for implementing those actions will be set forth in a separate implementation document. Following issuance of the implementation document, BLM State Offices will develop their own implementation plans for actions to be taken at the State office level.

Goals

Expand BLM's volunteer program.

Maximize BLM's effective use of volunteers.

The benefits -

- expanded capabilities for resource protection and service to public land users;
- increased public awareness of the public lands;
- broader public understanding of BLM's multiple use mandate;
- expanded public involvement in management of public lands resources;
- stronger public commitment to public lands stewardship.

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Objectives

- **Designate** staff at the State office level with full time permanent responsibility and accountability for volunteer coordination activities.

- **Evaluate** the need for staff at the district and resource levels with full time permanent responsibility and accountability for volunteer coordination activities in conjunction with the development of volunteer action plans.

- **Develop** needs assessments and action plans for volunteers which are tied to BLM resource management plans, annual work plans, and project plans.

- **Develop** annual budget requests and track budget expenditures associated with volunteer project planning, supervisory staff, equipment, supplies, training, etc. in support of volunteer activities consistent with action plans.

- **Develop** volunteer recruitment strategies in conjunction with developed needs assessments and action plans.

- **Enhance** training for all BLM employees with volunteer coordination and management responsibilities in the areas of volunteer -
  - recruitment,
  - selection,
  - supervision,
  - training,
  - incentives and retention,
  - evaluation,
  - recognition.

- **Increase and Diversify** tools for recruiting volunteers, e. g. computerized job banks, brochures, public service films and announcements, advertising, job fairs, speakers' bureaus, etc.

- **Develop** standard training for volunteers in the areas of
  - resource management;
  - interpretation;
  - supervision of other volunteers.

- **Establish** a BLM-wide policy on work schedules for BLM volunteer coordinators and BLM staff supervising volunteers, allowing maximum flexibility to accommodate volunteers' hours of availability.

- **Develop** mechanisms for obtaining and tracking information on volunteer skills and expertise.

- **Develop** mechanisms for obtaining feedback from volunteers for planning purposes and to improve program quality.

- **Develop** standard qualitative and quantitative indicators for measuring volunteer contributions which are related to BLM resource management plans, annual work plans, project plans and MBO objectives.

- **Develop** incentives for BLM employees to more effectively recruit and use volunteers to accomplish agency objectives.

- **Increase and Diversify** methods for publicizing volunteer contributions.

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